



Historical Highlights

Beginning in the early 1980s, a series of events unfolded that would set the stage for the future Adopt-A-Highway Program in California.

First, there was a serious lack of funding for roadside landscaping and maintenance. Therefore, maintenance work associated with the cosmetic appearance of roadsides was cut back.

Next, was then Governor Dukemejian's push towards privatization?

Then, in 1985, state legislation was passed that authorized Caltrans to "accept funds and or services for maintenance activities."

It also authorized the director of Caltrans to "install appropriate courtesy signs" to recognize the participants.

The intent of the legislation was to allow private-sector businesses to contribute labor or funding for landscape planting and roadside maintenance—not to set up an Adopt-A-Highway Program. In fact, no one had even heard of Adopt-A-Highway back in 1985.

In spite of the legislation, the private sector showed no interest in pursuing any such business arrangement with Caltrans.

So, for the next four years, landscapes along California's highways continued to deteriorate and the litter problem was fast becoming a public outrage.

Then Caltrans learned that many states were forming Adopt-A-Highway programs that utilized volunteers to help with litter removal and other roadside maintenance. With the appropriate legislation already in place, Caltrans had little trouble launching its own Adopt-A-Highway Program in October of 1989.

(NOTE: Texas was the first state, beginning its program in May of 1986. Louisiana was next, beginning in February of 1987. California was approximately the 20th state to institute an Adopt-A-Highway Program.)

After one month, the first Adopt-A-Highway status report showed a total of 9 adoption permits issued statewide. 5 were for litter removal; 2 were for tree planting and 1 was for wildflower planting. One year later, there were 498 groups.

Today there are 4,729 adoptions statewide and we've even had to establish waiting lists for prime sites. 3,950 of those adoptions are litter removal groups. These groups clean litter from approximately 7,850 miles of highway—over half of the State's highway system.